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ABSTRACT

After discussing several issues related to the disproportionately large number of minority students who initiate baccalaureate studies at two-year colleges, this paper urges minority community colleges to strengthen the college transfer function. The paper first summarizes the problems and characteristics of today's community college transfer student; statistically demonstrates the disproportionate concentration of minority students at two-year colleges: and points out that while community colleges have increased minority access to education, they have not succeeded in reducing minority attrition. The underrepresentation of Hispanics in higher education is then examined, as are the socioeconomic barriers to educational success faced by Hispanic students and the need to address these barriers in college articulation agreements. Finally, the paper presents ten recommendations for minority transfer education: (1) make transfer education a top institutional priority: (2) aggressively recruit minorities: (3) complete articulation agreements with high schools and universities: (4) place an individual in charge of the transfer process: (5) assess minority students' educational needs: (6) study retention/attrition factors: (7) conduct follow-up studies of transfer students: (8) establish a retention program: (9) provide counseling and support services: and (10) conduct relevant institutional research. (JP)

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THE TRANSFER FUNCTION IN MINORITY COMMUNITY COLLEGES WITH CHICANO STUDENTS

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THE TRANSFER FUNCTION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES WITH CHICANO STUDENTS

With the Hispanic student population projected to show a marked enrollment increase in higher education (Carnegie Council, 1980), minority community colleges serving Chicano students are faced with difficult challenges regarding the priorities of the different college functions, particularly the transfer function. In the decade of the 1980's, this function is jeopardized due to 1) the national trend of declining enrollments causing competitive intrusions from four-year colleges wishing to attract more students; 2) the addition of more college functions such as lifelong learning and continuing education; 3) the fact that community colleges have largely failed to assist students to persist in continuing their postsecondary studies towards the baccalaureate.

But because Chicanos are underrepresented in higher education and disproportiontely concentrated in two-year institutions, the transfer function becomes more important at a minority two-year college than at a majority two-year college. This implies that community colleges must guard against sacrificing mainstream program quality that could

widen the gap between majority and minority student attainment (Olivas, 1979). The transfer function is invalid if students opt not to partake of it. Likewise, it is invalid if students fail to complete their transfer coursework successfully and are subsequently ineligible to transfer. The transfer function is particularly invalid if students experience difficulties during and after transfer to the senior institutions, causing them to leave the arena of postsecondary education altogether. In short, community colleges must assure that the transfer function ceases to become the beginning of the end for students initiating their college parrallel work at the two-year college.

TRANSFER STUDENT PROFILE

Because ultimately an analysis of the transfer function is based on its consumers, students, it is important to consider the nature of transfer students: Who are they? What are their needs? What are their transfer patterns?

National Profile

In contrast to the homogeneous profile description of transferees presented by Knoll and Medsker in 1964, today's transfer students represent a more diverse cohort. They seem to average near 30 years of age. Many have a different lifestyle and background than four-year college freshpersons. More transferees are applying to public, liberal arts and research institutions than in the past when they were more

likely to attend a state, teachers or technical college. Potential transfers include more part-timers, women who are returning to the classroom, minority students, second career and second baccalaureate degree seekers, those renewing certificates and more traditional students who for geographical, family, financial, education or other reasons desire to change schools (Frielander, 1980; Masat, 1979, p. 4).

Transfer studies conducted in the late 1970's reveal two major transfer student characteristics. First, students experience a "transfer shock"--a grade drop in the first term in the upper division that is recovered in succeeding terms. But GPAs earned after the first year are good (2.00 or higher) and are many times indistinguishable from the native student population (Feldman, 1975; Fernandez, 1977; Florida State Department, 1978; Knoell and Medsker, 1964; Martinko, 1978; Miller, 1976; Moughamian, 1973). It appears that this shock is related to grading practices and other factors and that recovery is as much associated with natives as with transfers (Nickens, 1975). Martinko (1978) also finds that reverse transfers have a greater tendency to increase their GPAs when transferring to the community college. A second significant finding is that transfer students tend to attend a college close to home (Florida State Department, 1978; Moughamian, 1973; Nickens, 1975) and that institutional proximity is a major determinant in the student's success

(Fernandez, 1977).

Today's transfer students are difficult to trace and identify due to variances in institutional administrative practices used to define, count, and report transferees. Additionally, students show erratic transfer patterns. The typical transfer student who moved from a community college to a four-year college is joined by 1) intersector transfers, who move from one two-year college to another and 2) reverse transfers, who move from a four-year institution to a two-year institution (Lombardi, 1979:2-3).

Paradox of Two-Year Colleges

Many of minority students are disproportionately concentrated in two-year colleges. Table I indicates that minorities in 1976 constituted 56 percent of undergraduate enrollments in two-year colleges, with American Indians comprising 71 percent, Hispanics 59 percents and Blacks 58 percent.

Paradoxically, and contributing to the philosophical dilemnas of the community college, these colleges, while successfully attracting and enrolling minorities, have not had much success in increasing the chances of these students in earning a degree. "Even for high ability students, the chances of completing college by enrolling in a two-year institution are one out of three. On the other hand, high ability students enrolling in a four-year institution have a two out of three

chance to earn a college degree" (Dickey, 1975, p.19).

TABLE I --PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POSTSECONDARY UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT BY RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS, SEX, FULL-TIME AND PART-TIME ATTENDING 2-YEAR COLLEGES IN 1976

	Nonresident Alien	Black	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Hispanic	Minority Subtotals
Full-time	25	40	55	37	48	40
Part-time	74	97	99	99	65	87
Subtotal	34	56	72	57	54	54
Full-time	29	38	46	31	46	39
Part-time	79	97	99	95	95	96
Subtotal	43	58	70	53	64	59
All full-time	26	39	50	34	47	40
All part-time	76	97	99	97	79	91
TOTAL	36	58	71	55	59	56

SOURCE: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges 1979 and HEGIS data 1976 and 1977. In House Hearings, 1980.

More recently, data provided by the American Council on Education (1979) indicate that "only four out of ten entering freshmen are likely to receive a bachelor's degree from the same institution within four years. Although additional students may transfer or eventually finish, three out of ten will probably never obtain a baccalaureate" (p. 1). The highest attrition rate occurs during the first and second years of study, with first-generation students and those with poor academic recrods being the most prone to leaving.

Chicano Students

Since many community colleges have traditionally served a very high percentage of Chicano students, the importance of understanding the characteristic profile of these students cannot be overemphasized. The success or failure of the college's functions may well rest on the extent that the administration, faculty, counselors and staff understand and respond to the needs of this unique student group. Since separate data for Chicanos (individuals born in the U.S. of Mexican heritage) is difficult to retrieve because published federal (and state) data has been plagued by inaccurate disaggregation (Olivas, 1980), the umbrella term, Hispanic, will at times be used to explain characteristic elements of this group.

Overall the condition of Hispanic education is very bleak. An NCES report outlining this condition indicated

that: "Hispanic students fall behind in school more often, drop out twice as frequently as whites, and suffer the consequences of poor education with lower earnings and higher unemployment, with the worst school problems afflicting Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans" (Michigan Daily, 1980, p. 13). In its projections, the Carnegie Council (1980) noted that Hispanics were destined to become the largest minority population and would comprise a growing segment of students in higher education (p. 43). It is well beyond the scope of this paper to examine the socio-economic and political determinants that affect this group. Suffice it to say that many factors affect the overall dismal predicament of Hispanics.

De los Santos (1980, pp. 10-14) presents an excellent analysis of the Hispanic educational plight in Hispanics in Community Colleges. The author synthesizes available data and explains that among the different ethnic groups in the nation, the Spanish population is the youngest, with 22.1 years reported as the median age in 1978. The majority of Hispanics live in metropolitan areas and use and retain their mother tongue to a much greater degree than other ethnic groups. Moreover, in 1974-75 figures reporting the persons of Spanish origin who were 14 to 25 years old and who lived in households where Spanish was spoken, up to 45 percent had not completed high school. Only 15 percent of the potential college cohort between 19 and 25 years of age

of Spanish origin who actually spoke Spanish were enrolled in the educational system, and only 9 percent of those 26 to 34 years old were enrolled.

Three studies cite extremely discouraging data indicating that Hispanics fail to participate in higher education in proportional ratios. In 1972, The College Entrance Examination Board published Access to College for Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. The study indicated the low participation of Chicanos in higher education for five Southwestern states where this group is heavily concentrated: Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas.

In 1976, a doctoral dissertation by Ted Martinez included a follow-up study of the CEEB survey and concluded that after five years the enrollment pattern for Mexican-Americans had not improved significantly (de los Santos, 1980, p. 14). And again in 1980, Garcia and Peterson, examining patterns of Chicano participation in the same five Southwestern states from 1972 to 1976 provided the same dismal news: "Chicanos are underrepresented in colleges and universities of the Southwest" (Garcia and Peterson, 1980, p. 95). The authors cited sharp differences in enrollment patterns among the five states. While California, New Mexico, and Texas showed slight gains, Arizona and Colorado showed negligible gains. Arizona increased Chicano enrollments from 7.4 percent in 1972 to 8.1 percent in 1974 only to drop to 7.8 in 1976. Likewise, enrollment in Colorado dropped from 6.3 percent in 1972, to 5.4 percent in 1974 and only slightly

regained it to 6.4 percent in 1976. Conversely, the researchers found that Blacks by 1976 were overrepresented in Arizona, Colorado and California (Garcia and Peterson, 1980, pp. 42-52).

Within the five year period (1972-76) the researchers also found that modest increases in Chicano enrollments were attributable to increases registered in two-year colleges. By 1976, 52 percent of Chicano students were concentrated in junior and community colleges. In contrast, 35 percent of the white students were enrolled in these institutions. The authors also found that among the senior institutions, Chicanos were least represented in the most prestigious major research universities granting Ph.D.s. The pattern was particularly prominent in Texas and Colorado. Paradoxically, the researchers concluded that while two-year colleges might be increasing access (70 percent freshmen enrollment in 1976), Chicano enrollment proportions dropped sharply during the sophomore and junior years. Finally, the researchers concluded that Chicanos were not earning a disporportionate number of associate degrees. Instead, it appeared that they were experiencing exceptional difficulties in transferring to four-year colleges (Garcia and Peterson, 1980, pp. 42-93).

Barriers to Full Chicano Participation in Two and Four-Year Colleges

Plainly stated, studies suggest that Chicanos are:

1) overrepresented in two-year colleges and underrepresented in the Southwest; 2) not earning associates; 3) undergoing an alarming attrition rate during the freshmen and sophomore years; and 4) experiencing difficulties in transferring to four-year colleges. Clearly, these four factors magnify the need for junior-senior colleges to examine and move towards elimunating the barriers that preclude Chicanos from fully completing their postsecondary studies. The implication is that access must be matched by retention. Nieves (1977) outlines the problems minorities have with coping on campus. Because many come from low-income families and have suffered past discrimination, many are academically ill-prepared. The cultural shock minorities suffer (particularly in large four-year institutions) plagues them into the alien world of achievement, academic standards, and white middle-class attitudes, assumptions, customs, and traditions. To a greater degree than other college students, minorities: 1) feel unentitled to college; 2) experience loneliness and isolation; 3) set unrealistic goals; 4) fear performance evaluations; 5) feel alienated from the dominant culture and style; and 6) feel they have little internal control over events in their lives yet must respond to external forces (pp. 1-3).

Baeza (1980, pp. 1-6) maintains that placing the burdens of low minority participation in higher education on minority groups themselves is improper and unjust because the root

cause in social and structural inequities inherent in the functioning of social institutions and universities is evaded. Baeza cites three kinds of institutional barriers for Hispanics:

1. Financial--low income Hispanic students depend more on financial aid than do middle and upper income students; are less likely to enter graduate school because they accummulate a high loan indebtedness by the time they receive their undergraduate degree; are poor persisters compared to high income students; cannot expect secondary financial assistance from their families; in many cases they have to contribute to the family by sending money home.

2. Admissions--these barriers are found in five areas: the low quality of feeder institutions, grades, standardized tests, letters of recommendation and personal statements.

3. Faculty and Staff Attitudes--Of 1.5 percent of the total number of faculty found in community colleges and universities, the majority are in community colleges. Because of differences in language, culture, experiences and socialization, Anglo faculty are not prepared nor able to give the necessary support and encouragement to Hispanic students.

Clearly, if minorities are going to have any chance to succeed in finishing their degree studies, articulation between two- and four- year colleges will have to address more than quantitative policy judgements (number of credits transferred, GPA differentials, etc.). Qualitative policy judgements on the type of student leaving the two-year college and entering the four-year college are imperative to provide a bridge between the institutions and, more importantly, to provide a strong retention program in both kinds of institutions. In short, the commitment of the

community college as a transfer institution must not stop with an open-door, access philosophy. Likewise, in a period of declining enrollments, senior colleges must not prostitute their institutions to minorities who transfer without having strong retention programs that enhance the student's chances of finishing their postsecondary work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Minority community colleges serving Chicanos should continue to make transfer education a priority.

The transfer function is more important at a minority two-year institution than at a majority two-year institution because a disproportionate number of minorities elect to initiate their postsecondary studies towards the bacaalaureate at the community college. Given the fact that Chicanos are well underrepresented in the Southwest and grossly underrepresented in the nation, community colleges are in a unique position that can lessen the gap between minority and majority attaintment.

2. Community colleges should recruit students more aggressively from the community and surrounding area.

Studies demonstrate that students tend to pick a college close to home. For many Chicanos the community college represents the only place to initiate their postsecondary work. Recruitment literature should reflect the current profile of students--it should be aimed at Hispanics, women, older students, reverse transfers, academic and occupational transfers

as well as vocational students. The colleges should emphasize their open door philosophy of equal opportunity and access with the transfer function being a viable part of the college's mission and commitment. These colleges should also consider the possibility of setting up centers in selected city areas for students with transportation problems.

3. Effective junior-senior articulation should complement a high qualtity transfer program as an institutional priority.

Without effective junior-senior articulation a transfer program at the community college is seriously jeapordized. Some major issues that could be addressed include barriers towards effective transfer, securing financial aid, policies for reverse transfers, matching retention strategies at the senior institution, and determining how these strategies work to address the needs of Chicanos. The colleges might do well to initiate and maintain articulation with the local feeder schools and universities. Being middlemen between high schools and universities implies the interdependent nature of the community colleges with high schools and universities and that transfer/articulation issues can best be resolved through a holistic, well-planned strategey that involves the three.

4. At least one, if not two, individuals should be in charge of facilititing the transfer process for students.

This individual should be well versed in transfer and articulation issues and should be responsible for preparing

an information brochure for transfers and for maintaining contact with senior institutions to ensure that timely information is available for students. Special attention should be given to transfer students who experience the most difficulties; reverse transfers, occupational-technical transfers and students who decide to transfer late in their college career.

5. The community college should conduct a needs assessment and student profile study of potential community and area students.

The study should aim to determine: Where are most students coming from? High Schools? GED programs? Working students? Do they still represent the 18-24 age cohort? Are more students going to four-year institutions that are recruiting more aggressively? To which four-year colleges do most students seem to be transferring? Is the college getting a larger number of reverse transfers? Is the college serving a sizeable majority of Mexican Nationals? What are the needs of these students? How can the college curriculum, counseling and student support services be better organized to reflect these needs? The answers to these fundamental questions are important to increase access and to increase retention.

6. The community colleges should conduct a major retention/ attrition study to examine the extent of success or failure of their present transfer program.

The study should examine such issues as: What is the attrition rate of freshpersons compared to sophomores?

What are the causes of high absenteeism and poor grades? Is there any correlation between entrance exam scores and college persistence and success? Which majors are students selecting? Why are they selecting these majors? Do students who initially say they intend to transfer actually do so? Is the stop-out, stop-in phenomenon a prominent enrollment pattern? Are most students full-time or part-time students? Do certain study fileds have higher attrition rates than others? Study findings should be used to appropriately plan, staff and budget for this function.

7. A process to follow-up students through the initial, during and after enrollment stages should be developed.

Such a process would be helpful in determining grade and program progress, changes in the student's educational intent, the transfer shock phenomenon at the transfer institution, reasons for attrition, and degree or certificate earned. A composite, yearly picture of this follow-up should be provided to administrators, faculty, counselors and other interested parties to aid them in planning their departments' priorities.

8. The community colleges should establish a strong retention program that begins with a viable instructional program based on student needs.

A diversity of curricular programs: remedial/developmental, honors, occupational-technical, bilingual education, cluster units, day and evening classes, among others, should be made available in order to attract students with different needs and time schedules. The colleges should take caution, however,

in trying to be "all things to all people." First consideration should be to maintain the mainstream program quality and to improve the condition of Chicano education. It would be foolhardy to expect the four-year institutions to immediately (even in the face of declining enrollments) have a staff that is sensitive to the needs of Chicanos and to provide viable instructional and counseling programs for the underprepared student. The reality is that Chicanos find something special in the community colleges--many times they find a sensitive faculty and staff and a close to home milieu that is warm and supportive. The colleges must go beyond that initial attractiveness and provide the elements of a high quality curriculum--an emphasis on reading, writing, time management and computational skills. The community colleges, unlike senior institutions are known for their emphasis on instruction and should build on this goal. They should hire and train committed, sensitive staff who understand, and want to deal with the student population and the philosophy and goals of a two-year college. Quality should pervade teaching, counseling and support services. The students deserve no less.

9. <u>Effective counseling and guidance services should support the instructional program as part of the colleges' retention strategy</u>.

Transfer students, especially, should be helped to select a career goal early in college to avoid loss of credits. Students must not be forgotten beyond the freshman year. It is important to understand that transfer students experience a second access

problem--transferring to four-year college. Besides a transfer shock, they also experience a culture shock and the combination of access difficulties and transfer/culture shock can certainly contribute to a decline of Chicano participation in higher education. Mere familiarization of college catalogues is hardly sufficient to assist students with the transfer process. It is important that students be counseled about the transfer/culture shock phenomenon, problems with financial aid, applying to four-year colleges, adjusting to a new environment, and dealing with new attitudes, among others.

10. Institutional research must become an institutional priority.

Many issues at community colleges need careful, well-researched study through a research office. One possibility for improvement is to encourage tenured faculty in programs that have experienced severe declines to conduct research on access, transfer, and retention problems. This office should also be responsible for maintaining and updating a centralized student information system where a student profile, including choice of major, type of degree awarded, among others, can be kept. This office should also conduct an institution specific transfer student follow-up and a Chicano student study.

Currently, not very much good research is available on Chicano students and with projections of increased Hispanics in the nation's colleges, this research is essential. These findings, including a profile, transfer barriers specific to Chicanos, curricular strategies that work with Chicanos,

among others, should be widely published in the community, in educational journals, and shared with other institutions enrolling similar kinds of students who wish to build their access, transfer and retention programs around student needs.

While other postsecondary institution ponder the decline of transfer education and the decline of enrollments, community colleges enrolling a large proportion of Chicanos must deliberate the future of their transfer function in a period of dilemma. Despite the philosophical paradox of providing opportunities while perpetrating inequities, these two-year colleges must deal with realities. The realities are that Chicanos <u>are</u> electing to attend community colleges, that four-year institutions are unable (or unwilling) to provide minorities the same kinds of academic and support services that are traditionally provided in the two-year colleges, and that for many students community colleges with their transfer function represent the only viable hope and alternative to commence their postsecondary studies that lead to a baccalaureate. Community colleges would do well to note that these realities require more than written commitments: they demand immediate, operative action.

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